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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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It appears that history is repeating itself! What was once the primary focus for this magazine many years ago, and the iconic symbol for our early computing pasttime - Ayari - has filed for bankruptcy.

While the action is reportedly to have happened in an effort for Atari to break away from its parent company, Atari SA, it might result in the final chapter for the company.

Atari has been there before. And how many times has it been bought and "changed" over the years? Too many. Its initial roots as a game company might not save it this time around. Think about it, how many times and versions of their vast library of "retro" games can be released?

Yes, the Atari brand is iconic, an incredible piece of history. But, sooner or later, icons tend to fade away. Time will tell whether or not Atari will suffer a similar fate.

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Atari Files for Bankruptcy!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Atari Is in Trouble Again!
Sony EU Fined PSN Hack!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Atari Files for Bankruptcy

Had you forgotten that Atari exists? Well, it sounds like it may sadly not exist for much longer.

The LA Times reports that the cherished retro brand and three of its affiliates filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in New York last night. Apparently the motivation was for the company to break free from French parent company Atari SA.

2012 was a torrid year for Atari, with a spate of retro re-releases unable to prevent revenue falling 34 per cent and profit reaching just $11m. Its share price currently stands at under 1.

If successful, it could see the company emerge free from the debts that have been holding it back. It is also looking for a clean break from its London-based finance partner BlueBay, an entity on which Atari is currently almost completely reliant upon and that currently lacks the clout to allow the publishing of any of the company s in-development titles.

Atari Is in Trouble Again

Atari is declaring bankruptcy twice. Both the U.S. video game company and its French parent have done so, the latest twist for the company which largely invented the video game industry and remains synonymous with it, despite having seen its glory days end by the mid-1980s.

But wait. Even though the Atari name celebrated its fortieth anniversary last year, it s a mistake to talk about Atari as if it s a corporate entity which has been around for four decades. (The Los Angeles Times Ben Fritz, for instance, refers to it as an iconic but long-troubled video game maker.) Instead, it s a famous name which has drifted from owner to owner. It keeps being applied to different businesses, and yes, for all its fame, it does seem to be a bit of a jinx.

Here s a quick rundown of what Atari has meant at different times (thanks, Wikipedia, for refreshing my memory):

1972-1976: It s an up-and-coming, innovative startup cofounded by Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney.

1976-1984: It s part of Warner Communications (which, years later, merged with Time Inc. to form Time Warner, overlord of this website). It s a massively successful maker of video games and consoles, but then it crashes, along with the rest of the industry.

1984-1996: Atari morphs into a semi-successful maker of PCs when it s acquired by Tramel Technology, a company started by Jack Tramiel, the ousted founder of Commodore.

1996-1998: Tramiel runs Atari into the ground. After merging with hard-disk maker JTS, the company and brand are largely dormant.

1998-2000: Atari resurfaces under the ownership of toy kingpin Hasbro as a line of games published under the Atari Interactive name.

2000-present: It becomes a corporate entity controlled by French game

publisher Infogrames, which increasingly emphasizes the Atari moniker over its own and takes over completely in 2008. In recent years, it s focused on digital downloads, mobile games and licensing of its familiar brand and logo.

The above chronology doesn t account for Atari s original business: arcade games. As far as I can tell, the arcade arm was owned at different times by Warner Communications/Time Warner (twice!), Pac-Man purveyor Namco and arcade icon Midway, among other companies. But use of the Atari brand on arcade hardware petered out in 2001.

Basically, Atari has never been one well-defined thing for more than twelve years, max, at a time. That the name has survived at all is a testament to its power and appeal. And even though the current Atari has fallen on hard times, I ll bet that the brand survives for at least a few more decades, in one form or another. Several forms, probably.

PS4: Sony Will Let Microsoft Make First Move

You may have noticed that there are lots of rumours flying about regarding next-gen consoles. No one knows definitely when Microsoft and Sony will unveil their successors to the current Xbox and PlayStation, but Sony CEO Kazuo Hirai has said that it will let Microsoft make the first move.

In the Business section of The Times today, Hirai said, "Why go first, when your competitors can look at your specifications and come up with something better?"

With Nintendo already out the next-gen blocks with the Wii U, can Sony hold its bottle until the Microsoft announces? Surely his comments are slightly disingenuous, since there would be relatively little scope for changing the specs of the PlayStation this late in its development cycle. It’s more likely that the additional time would be use to adjust the messaging surrounding the announcement.

Last week was a speculation rich week for the PlayStation 4, with reports that Sony will retire the DualShock controller.

Sony EU Fined £250k for 2011 PSN Hack

Sony Computer Entertainment Europe has been fined £250,000 for 2011’s PlayStation Network breach by the UK Information Commissioners Office.

ICO is an independent authority tasked with looking after the information rights of the public. David Smith, deputy commisioner and director of Data Protection at ICO said that Sony "let everybody down", and that it was "the most serious breach we have had reported to us." ICO’s report "found that the attack could have been prevented if the software had been up-to-date, while technical developments also meant passwords were not secure."

The PSN hack occurred sometime between 17-19 April, with Sony forced to shut down the service on April 20. The outage lasted for 24 days in total, with personal information being taken from the 77 million

accounts.

Speaking with MCV (the trade magazine for the UK games trade), Sony said that it "strongly disagrees" with the verdict and plans to appeal. SCEE rightly points out that, despite technical weaknesses, Sony was itself the victim of an attack. It has also been quick to point out that there is no evidence that encrypted payment card details were accessed, and that personal data is unlikely to have been used for fraudulent purposes.

Sony went on to say:

"Criminal attacks on electronic networks are a real and growing aspect of 21st century life and Sony continually works to strengthen our systems, building in multiple layers of defence and working to make our networks safe, secure and resilient.

"The reliability of our network services and the security of our consumers information are of the utmost importance to us, and we are appreciative that our network services are used by even more people around the world today than at the time of the criminal attack."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Authorities Charge Three Over "Gozi" Computer Virus

Three foreign nationals have been charged with creating and distributing a computer virus that infected more than a million computers around the world, including some operated by the U.S. space agency, U.S. prosecutors said on Wednesday.

The defendants were charged with running a cybercrime ring that released the so-called Gozi virus, which prosecutors said was one of the most financially destructive computer viruses in history.

The virus infected at least 40,000 computers in the United States, authorities said. It was used to access personal bank account information from computer users and steal millions of dollars from customer accounts globally, according to papers filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan.

The defendants - Deniss Calovskis, 27, a Latvian; Nikita Kuzmin, 25, a Russian; and Mihai Ionut Paunescu, 28, a Romanian - were charged with a variety of counts, including conspiracy to commit computer intrusion and conspiracy to commit bank fraud.

They ran a "modern-day bank robbery ring that required neither a gun nor a mask," Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said at a news conference.

Kuzmin, who helped create the virus, pleaded guilty in May 2011 and has

been cooperating with the investigation, said George Venizelos, assistant director-in-charge for the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s New York office.

The investigation is still "very much ongoing," Venizelos told the news conference.

Investigators have collected 51 computer servers and other equipment with some 250 million megabytes of information as part of the probe, he said, adding that law enforcement officials in several countries were helping with the investigation.

Kuzmin was arrested in the United States in November 2010. Paunescu was arrested this past November in Romania while Calovskis was arrested in December in Latvia, Venizelos said. He said Paunescu and Calovskis were awaiting extradition.

David Gordon, a lawyer representing Kuzmin, did not immediately return a call seeking comment. Attorney information for the other defendants was not immediately available.

The virus infected more than 160 NASA computers, resulting in more than $40,000 in damage, prosecutors said in the court documents.

It was unclear if the virus affected NASA’s operations, and a spokeswoman from the agency had no immediate comment.

Kuzmin conceived of the virus in or around 2005 and recruited Calovskis to help write its code, prosecutors said.

According to the government’s charges, the men sold the virus online in what Bharara called an "Internet bazaar" for as much as $50,000.

Paunescu is accused of operating a Web hosting service from computers in Romania, the United States and elsewhere that helped people who bought the virus avoid detection by authorities, according to court papers.

"Instead of ’this gun’s for hire,’ Kuzmin’s operation was ’this virus for hire,’" Venizelos said. The virus was often updated and improved for customers in what Venizelos said was their own version of tech support.

In one scenario, the defendants created fake welcome pages for banks that asked for customer PIN numbers and other sensitive information, Bharara said.

Terrorists Knocked Off Twitter After Threats

The Twitter account belonging to a self-identified spokesperson for an al Qaeda-allied terrorist organization has been suspended.

The account, which began in late 2011 and is believed to belong to a representative of al-Shabaab, a Somalia-based terrorist organization, is currently out of service, days after it threatened the lives of Kenyan hostages, according to a report by The Associated Press.

Representatives for Twitter declined to comment on exactly when or why al-Shabaab’s account was suspended, due to "privacy and security reasons,"

but under "Twitter Rules," the company writes on its website that "you may not publish or post direct, specific threats of violence against others."

In addition to the reported threats against the Kenyans, earlier this month the same account posted a long missive about France's failed attempt to rescue a French intelligence agent codenamed Denis Allex and posted images of another man it said was a French special operations soldier who was killed in the doomed raid. The statement said the group had reached a "verdict" on what to do about Allex and, a few days later, al-Shabaab said they planned to execute the spy. Then, using Twitter, they announced Allex was dead.

The account, along with those of other terrorist organizations, for years has provided a window, tinted by propaganda, into the group, its ambitions and inner troubles - a resource for journalists and, presumably, interested intelligence agencies.

For instance, in March 2012, Twitter was the forum al-Shabaab used to deny it had arrested or was trying to kill its most high-profile member, Omar Hammami, a rapping American jihadist who goes by the nom de guerre Abu Mansoor al-Amriki. Hammami had taken to the internet to describe, in detail, a fissure within the terror group. He may himself be operating another Twitter account with which he engages in long exchanges about the state of jihadism in Somalia.

In September 2011, ABC News reported on a curious public spat that emerged between NATO forces and the Taliban - all over Twitter. Lebanon-based Hezbollah, considered a terrorist organization by the U.S. government, also has a media arm that Tweets frequently.

Should Twitter Be Forced To Reveal Racist Users?

A cursory Twitter search for any number of hate-filled phrases too vulgar to print here reveals a deep well of nastiness and ugly racism. In the United States, users are protected under the First Amendment. But what happens when a user's hate-speech violates the law in other countries?

A French judge ruled Thursday that Twitter would have to reveal the details of users who post racist or offensive tweets. The social network has not decided if it will comply, and insists that it is only subject to laws in the United States, where it maintains offices and stores information.

It all started with a case brought by The Association of Jewish Students (UEJF), which claimed that pseudonymous users behind the hashtag #unbonjuif (#agoodjew) had violated French laws that prohibits racist and inflammatory speech. Twitter agreed to remove the offending tweets, which has long been its policy when laws in foreign countries are broken. On Thursday, however, the high court in Paris ordered Twitter to hand over the account information of offenders to authorities. Furthermore, the social network must also "roll out as part of its French platform" a new notice system that is "easily accessible and visible" to flag questionable content. Failure to comply within two weeks will result in a 1,000 fine per day.

A spokesperson for Twitter said Thursday that the company is reviewing its legal options. "It is a big deal because it shows the conflict between

laws in France and laws in the U.S., and how difficult it can be for companies doing business around the world," Françoise Gilbert, a French lawyer who represents Silicon Valley companies on both sides of the Atlantic, tells The New York Times. On the plus side for Twitter, the company (unlike Facebook and Google) doesn't maintain offices in France and, according to the Times, "does not face the prosecution of its employees" there.

This isn't Twitter's first free-speech controversy. The company made headlines in October when it complied with the German government's request to block account access for a neo-Nazi group accused of anti-Semitism. Just as controversially, it blocked a Financial Times journalist for lashing out at NBC for its Olympic coverage last summer, and posted the email of one of the network's executives. In 2011, the company agreed to help British authorities unmask a California man who used an anonymous account to defame members of a British town council.

It's a disturbing trend for free speech advocates, wrote Mathew Ingram at GigaOm late last year. "More than anything, these kind of cases reinforce how much private entities like Twitter and Google now have over what information we receive (or are able to distribute), and the responsibility that this power imposes on them."

But even when corporate Twitter hangs back, the Twitter community has its own methods for self-policing in the United States. In November, Jezebel controversially published a slideshow outing users who used the n-word to express their distaste for a newly re-elected President Obama. (The blog even alerted a few of the offenders' schools, leading to suspensions.) And other accounts, like @YesYoureRacist, are similarly dedicated to shaming users that post racist tweets.

Either through peer pressure or legal suits, we're seeing a pushback to racist material on Twitter, particularly against users who hide behind anonymous account names. And some say that's a positive development. "The internet is real," wrote Matt Buchanan at Buzzfeed, in a post titled "Why social media shaming is okay."

When you say things on the Internet now, they carry real weight and meaning. That evolution is a good thing, mostly. But reality has a price, and it is consequence. If you didn't know that already, you should now.

Apple's China Dilemma: Market Share or Cachet?

Apple Inc's third straight disappointing quarter signals an urgent need for the global technology leader to drum up new revenue - and China may provide the answer.

Now more than ever, analysts say, Apple needs to get it right in the world's most populous country, where it ranks only sixth in annual smartphone sales and Samsung Electronics remains the runaway leader.

Apple's best plan of attack remains securing a deal with the country's top mobile carrier by far, China Mobile Ltd. It also needs to push the development of more localized apps and extend installment financing to bring its pricey smartphones within the reach of an urban populace with an average annual income of just $3,500.

But it should resist the temptation to just put out a cheaper iPhone, some analysts say. Introducing a long-rumored lower-cost version of the gadget could backfire by diluting Apple’s premium brand - one of its most valuable assets.

"If you think of Apple, it’s like a bright star in the galaxy, shining so brightly and everyone is looking at it. But it might have dimmed a bit as other stars such as Samsung have popped up," said TZ Wong, an analyst at research firm IDC.

"I don’t think it’s in Apple’s interest to further dim its star power by stepping into the low-end segment."

With Apple’s product pipeline guarded with the same zeal accorded state secrets, some analysts are focusing instead on what the world’s largest technology company needs to do to finally become a major player in the world’s No. 2 economy.

While iPhone sales leapt 60 percent last quarter, investors worry that, in the longer term, the company may be pricing itself out of a golden opportunity while Samsung and local rivals from Huawei Technologies Co Ltd to ZTE blanket the market with cheaper phones that rival the iPhone in quality and usability.

A deal with China Mobile, the world’s largest mobile phone carrier with more than 700 million users, will prove instrumental but analysts say that may not happen until the issuance of 4G wireless licenses, which could take place later this year or even in 2014.

"The competitive landscape has definitely cranked up a few notches from a year ago. So there is more urgency for Apple to explore its ways to grow," IDC’s Wong said.

CEO Tim Cook has made it no secret that China is an area of intense focus for the iPad and iPhone maker, especially given the still-low penetration across the country of smartphones and tablets. Apple has said it will continue to expand its retail network there, and in January, Cook flew to Beijing for at least the second time in a year, to meet with pivotal carrier China Mobile.

On Wednesday, Apple missed revenue forecasts for the third straight quarter after iPhone sales came in below expectations, fanning fears that its dominance of consumer electronics is slipping.

Apple’s revenue in China, including neighboring Hong Kong and Taiwan, totaled $7.3 billion in the December quarter, up 60 percent from a year earlier.

But there are signs that Apple’s vaunted cachet in the world’s most populous nation is waning.

Recent product launches for the mini-iPad and the iPhone 5 have drawn a relatively subdued response from Chinese consumers, in stark contrast to the fist-fights and egg-hurling at its Beijing store a year ago when sales of the iPhone 4S were delayed.

Since the iPhone 5 went on sale in mid-December, transactions have fallen by half, according to the Taobao Index, the consumer research data website of Internet giant Alibaba Group.

The iPhone is also losing out as consumers opt for bigger screens to watch Chinese soap operas while travelling on trains, or affordable smartphones in the sub-1,000 yuan ($160) category made by local vendors.

"When I started using a bigger screen, there was no turning back for me. Small screens don’t work anymore," said a business executive surnamed Wen, as he swiped the screen on his Samsung Galaxy Note during lunch in Beijing.

Around half of the more than 60 million smartphones shipped in China in the third quarter last year had screens that were bigger than 4 inches, based on IDC’s latest figures. The iPhone 5 comes with a 4-inch screen, while the Galaxy Note II’s screen is 5.5 inches.

Also, local vendors such as Coolpad smartphone maker Yulong Computer Telecommunication Scientific (Shenzhen) Co Ltd, which offers cheaper alternatives, and Meizu Technology Co Ltd, known for its minimalist designs, have seen its legion of fans grow.

Price is a key factor, especially in the Chinese market where around 80 percent of the more than one billion mobile phone users are still on 2G networks.

On the online Taobao website, Coolpads and low-end models made by Huawei Technologies Co Ltd and ZTE Corp are selling at below 1,000 yuan, a sweet spot for many consumers switching from basic phones to smartphones.

Apple has moved to address that, partnering with China Merchants Bank to offer financing and installment options so that buyers can pay with the bank’s credit card when they shop online, media reports said.

Finally, expanding the number of applications customized for China will help grow Apple’s market share but that might need tighter collaboration with Chinese companies, such as Baidu Inc and Tencent Holdings Ltd.

"Consumers will definitely welcome closer cooperation between Apple and Chinese tech firms to customize the iPhone for the use of apps such as Tencent’s WeChat," said Frederick Wong, executive director of Avant Capital Management (Hong Kong) Ltd, a fund that invests in Apple-related options.

Court: Sex Offender Facebook Ban Unconstitutional

An Indiana law that bans registered sex offenders from using Facebook and other social networking sites that can be accessed by children is unconstitutional, a federal appeals court ruled Wednesday.

The 7th U.S. Circuit of Appeals in Chicago overturned a federal judge’s decision upholding the law, saying the state was justified in trying to protect children but that the "blanket ban" went too far by restricting free speech.

The 2008 law "broadly prohibits substantial protected speech rather than specifically targeting the evil of improper communications to minors," the judges wrote.

"The goal of deterrence does not license the state to restrict far more speech than necessary to target the prospective harm," they said in a 20-page decision.

The judges noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has also struck down laws that restricted the constitutional right to freedom of expression, such as one that sought to ban leafleting on the premise that it would prevent the dropping of litter.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Walton Pratt ruled in June that the state has a strong interest in protecting children and found that social networking had created a "virtual playground for sexual predators to lurk." She noted that everything else on the Internet remained open to those who have been convicted of sex offenses.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana filed the class-action suit on behalf of a man who served three years for child exploitation and other sex offenders who are restricted by the ban even though they are no longer on probation.

Courts have long allowed states to place restrictions on convicted sex offenders who have completed their sentences, controlling where many live and work and requiring them to register with police. But the ACLU contended that even though the Indiana law is only intended to protect children from online sexual predators, social media websites are virtually indispensable. The group said the ban prevents sex offenders from using the websites for legitimate political, business and religious purposes.

The ACLU applauded the decision.

"Indiana already has a law on the books that prohibits inappropriate sexual contacts with children," including penalties for online activities, ACLU legal director Ken Falk said. "This law sought to criminalize completely innocent conduct that has nothing to do with children."

Indiana Attorney General Greg Zoeller said his office would review the ruling before deciding on the next step.

Federal judges have barred similar laws in Nebraska and Louisiana. Louisiana legislators passed a new, narrower law last year that requires sex offenders to identify themselves on Facebook and similar sites. A federal judge struck down part of Nebraska’s law last October.

Antigua Could Hit U.S. with Copyright-free Downloads

The tiny Caribbean nation of Antigua and Barbuda will tell the World Trade Organization on Monday that it intends to use trade sanctions against the United States, which it could enforce by allowing movie downloads without protecting U.S. copyright.

Antigua has the right to do so because it won a WTO legal case, first launched in 2003, against a U.S. ban on online gambling. The United States then said it would no longer apply WTO rules to gambling but failed to offer Antigua comparable access in other services, as it should have.

Antigua won the right to hit back with trade sanctions and - with little hope of persuading Washington by threatening to block U.S. imports to the nation of 70,000 - it was given permission to use intellectual property instead.

"American intellectual property rights holders are fighting piracy across the globe. They hate the theft of their intellectual property rights and they spend enormous sums trying to prevent it," Mark Mendel, a lawyer representing Antigua in the case, told Reuters.

He declined to say exactly how Antigua might act, but said it could include copyrights, patents or trademarks.

A website that allowed users to download U.S. software or movies without paying anything to the copyright holders was one possibility, as was selling Manchester United T-shirts - the soccer club is owned by the American Glazer family.

"If, when, how it’s going to happen, people will just have to wait to find out."

Although the WTO awarded Antigua the right to impose only $21 million in annual sanctions, Mendel said the size of the award was not an obstacle.

If Antigua were to begin a state-sponsored website to download Hollywood movies and U.S.-made computer software, it could still inflict a lot of damage on U.S. rights holders.

"When you think about it, $21 million could be all accomplished in one go or in 50 million goes. The dollar figure is not important," he said.

Asked if a site charging one cent per download would be a way to accomplish Antigua’s aims, he said: "That is an intellectual possibility."

The WTO gave Antigua the right to retaliate with sanctions in December 2007 and it announced last month that it had finally given up waiting for a U.S. compromise proposal. The government hoped the threat of sanctions would break the logjam, Mendel said.

"We’ve heard a lot more from them (the U.S. negotiators) over the past two weeks than over the past 10 years." He added that Antigua’s main aim was still to get the United States to comply.

In an emailed reply to a request for comment, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Trade Representative said: "The U.S. is in ongoing discussions with Antigua in an effort to find a mutually satisfactory resolution to this dispute."

The United States should be worried about other WTO members following Antigua and using the same tactic to get their way in trade disputes, Mendel said.

"If they aren’t worried enough about Antigua they should be worried about someone else coming along. If we do something inventive that could pose a lot of problems for intellectual property holders, if we create that precedent, the consequences could be enormous," he said.

"With Antigua, it’s $21 million. Maybe with China it’s going to be $21 billion," said Mendel.

"One of the messages we want to get across is that the WTO was sold to smaller countries as a level playing field and a way for them to expand the reach of commerce, subject to a set of rules that apply to everybody. I think more than anything else this case is about fairness. The WTO is supposed to be fair."

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